

Short Stories that Interest

THE MYSTERY

FIND the thieves yet?" asked Chisholm carelessly, as he helped himself to one of Stephen Sheldon's cigars and settled in to a comfortable chair.

Sheldon's face clouded.

"What's the use of spilling a good dinner by bringing that up?" he demanded irritably. "I'm trying to forget it here in the house. It's bad enough to have it staring me in the face at the office."

"Because I want a chance at the game, if every one else is through with it," exclaimed Chisholm.

"Look here, Frank," exclaimed Sheldon, twisting in his chair to face the younger man. "I have spent more than \$10,000 on this case in detective fees alone, and for that sum you can get the best talent in the market. Do you suppose that you can succeed where the best and brightest men in the country have been forced to acknowledge defeat?"

"It was David, wasn't it, who plugged Gollath when the heavyweight champions all took the count in one round?" asked Chisholm. "I'm not suggesting that I am another David, you know, only sometimes the little fellow gets there when the big man falls."

"But you are not a detective," objected Sheldon.

"Therefore I shall not work along the lines they employ. Or necessity, I shall have to strike out for myself along original lines."

"Go ahead if you want to," granted Sheldon, carelessly. "You might as well try it, too. Every one else seems to have had a try at it. You can't do any harm, and it may amuse you for a week."

"I'll be on the job in the morning," promised Chisholm. "I was going on a cruise with Billy Travers, but this promises to be more fun. Now let's talk of more pleasant things. Heard from Irma today?"

For answer, the merchant took a letter from the library table and while Chisholm read it he prepared the chess table for a game. He was a capital player, but he found his match in Chisholm, and it was their common interest in chess that had made Frank Chisholm a welcome guest at the Sheldons.

Even when he had fallen in love with Irma, and was refused her hand, it made no difference in his nightly calls, and Stephen Sheldon rather regretted that he could not say "yes" instead of "no" and make them happy.

Irma returned Chisholm's affection, but her father was determined that his son-in-law should be competent to carry on the great business enterprise which had made the Sheldon family rich, and beyond his skill at chess, Chisholm gave little evidence of deep thought, largely because there was no reason to do so.

His own income was derived from real estate which an agent looked after, and the fortune had been founded by his great-grandfather, who had wisely settled upon a farm which later had become the heart of the city.

Sheldon supposed that he would take interest in the matter for a couple of days, and then slip off on a cruise or something of that sort. When Chisholm presented himself at the office the next morning, he found him over to the bookkeeper for information.

The bookkeeper gave him the facts in the case and let him read the reports of the various detective agencies, then Chisholm, with a remark about having lunch, strolled out of the building.

The Sheldon manufacturing plant depended largely upon the country and South American trade, particularly the latter, for a market for the novelties which were turned out. The great six-story building was crowded with machinery and under the elaborate system devised by a business expert, the constant movement of the stock was downward until it finally reached the shipping department in the basement.

The receiving department was in the subbasement where the raw material was stored until it was sent up to the top floor on the elevator to commence the downward journey that was to end at the cellar.

Somewhere on the trip both raw material and the finished product disappeared. The thefts were not heavy in any one day, but they formed a constant drain that had gradually cut down the earnings of the factory from a profit to a loss.

Just where the leakage occurred could not be determined. The entire block of which the factory occupied almost a third, had been turned inside out, and cordons of police had been drawn about the block night after night.

The factory itself had been patrolled by detectives, and for more than a week a covey of men had received the shipments and had unpacked them at dock and depot in the chance that the stolen goods might have been shipped to some firm in collusion with the inside men.

In every case investigation was fruitless and at last the search had been dropped. It was merely adding

to the losses on the thefts, and Mr. Sheldon had almost decided to give up the business or remove it to some other location.

Chisholm dined with the manufacturer that evening and shook his head when asked if there were any developments.

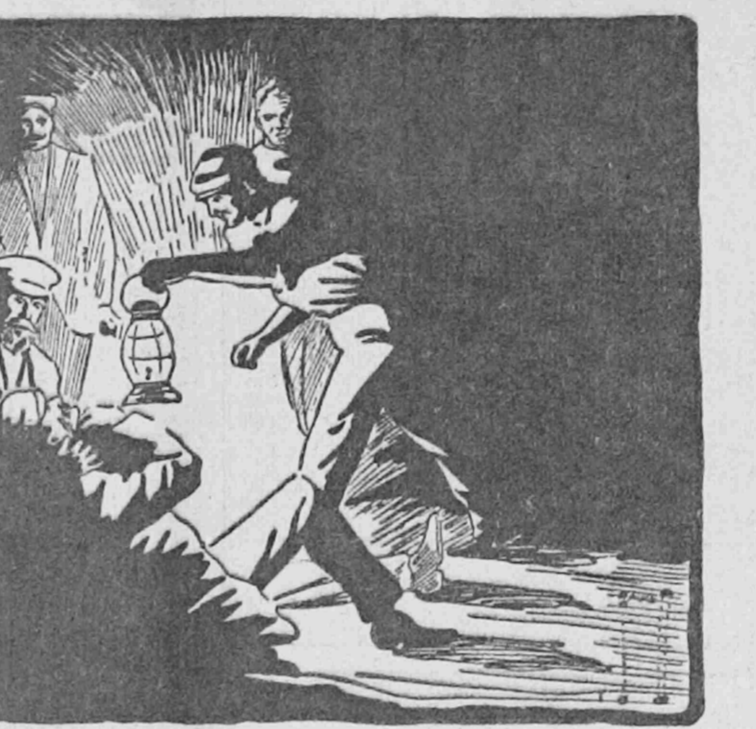
"The only discovery I made is that there seems to be sewer gas in the cellar," he said lightly. "Better have

broke out Sheldon impetuously. "I paid an expert \$5,000 to devise a perfect system. According to theory, the whole of the stock should be accounted for. Why a workman cannot even get a lathe tool in the morning without giving a receipt, and unless he hands in all his tools and gets his receipt back at night, he is charged with the loss. Yet the other night five gross of cheap watches disap-

peared without a trace. The watchmen were searched when they left in the morning, and the whole factory was turned inside out with no result."

"That's a more baffling proposition than chess," said Chisholm carelessly. "Let's take to chess for a change."

Sheldon smiled at Chisholm's willingness to drop the discussion. He had believed all along that when the latter came to realize the magnitude of the task he would become discouraged.



THEY CARED FOR THE INJURED.

the plumbers in."

"That is no new discovery," declared Sheldon with a laugh. "We had men in week before last. They went all over the equipment and could not trace a leak, while all the traps worked properly. They think that in some way it must come in through the walls. The subcellar is close to the new trunk sewer in Ogden street."

"I guess it doesn't take detective to make that discovery," admitted Chisholm with a little laugh. "Still, a bad beginning sometimes makes a good ending. It's a great system you have installed."

"That is what irritates me so,"

chess table from him and rose from his chair.

"It's a bit early to close the game," he said with a poor attempt to conceal his elation, "but I happen to have a date. Don't you want to come along?"

"What is it? A smoker at the club?"

"Better than that," declared Chisholm. "If all goes well, we'll have your tormentors behind the bars before morning."

"You mean—"

"I mean that I have won—by a nose," was the enigmatical answer. "We will have to make a start if we are to be in at the finish. I've a cab outside, and we can get there in no time at all."

A hansom stood at the door and the brisk drive in the night air to the business section steadied the nerves. What he was able to descend from the cab unaided when they stopped, and he paused to regard his where-

abouts wonderingly.

He was some four blocks from his own place of business and nearer the water front. From the shadows of a shop there emerged half a dozen men in dark clothes. One who seemed to be a leader greeted Chisholm, who introduced his companion.

"It looks to me as though a rank outsider had beaten us to the goal," said the detective, as he acknowledged the introduction.

"Do you think that he really has run down the thieves?" asked Sheldon.

"Not the slightest doubt of it," was the answer as the men fell in and with quiet tread moved toward an open dock.

It was one of the public piers where fishermen and pleasure boatmen moored their craft. The basin was scantily filled, for the fishing fleet was away, but half a dozen boats were moored to the three sides of the dock and though the decks were deserted the lights shone from some of the cabin portholes.

The first men disposed themselves on the other side of the street, while other parties moved toward the two piers that formed two sides of the basin.

Chisholm, in spite of his evening clothes and English overcoat, lay prone upon the sidewalk in the shadow of a wagon that stood before a junk shop. For more than an hour he remained there, then with an eager face he sprang to his feet and made a sign to the detective.

The gleam of an electric lantern shone for a moment toward the sea wall to be answered by a faint point of light out in the stream. A moment later a faint panting announced the approach of a motor boat, and the deeper note of a tug's exhaust was quickly heard.

Tearing off the manhole cover several of the men dropped into the black opening as a tug followed the motor boat into the basin and flooded the place with a blinding glare from a search light.

Almost at the same moment there was the sound of pistol shots from the sea wall which were answered from the motor boat, and an instant later there were shots in the sewer and the white smoke drifted up through the opening.

On the sea wall some sort of a fight was going on, half a dozen of the police engaging with two men who suddenly appeared above the wall, then the detectives clambered out from the sewer, lifting out one of their own men who had been injured and two others in rough clothes whose faces were stamped with the hall mark of evil.

A crowd, attracted by the sound of the shots, quickly formed, but the detectives had already signaled for the reserves from two precincts, and the bluecoated men swarmed everywhere.

An ambulance surgeon came to dress the wounds of the injured, and almost before he realized what had

happened the patrol wagons dashed off again, and Sheldon was following Chisholm across the street to the dock.

Immediately below them a rude scow was moored and on her decks the dark red pools told of a fight on board. Now policemen were swarming over the craft and as they came up the hatches were raised.

Chisholm dropped lightly to the deck and followed the men down the hatchway, only to reappear in a moment with a satisfied smile on his face.

In answer to his call the officers assisted Mr. Sheldon to join him on the deck and Chisholm led him to the hatchway.

"I suppose that you can identify those boxes," he said lightly as he pointed into the shallow hold.

Sheldon nodded.

"All of them seem to be from my place," he said. "How did they come here?"

Chisholm pointed to the sea wall where, just above the water's edge there appeared the top of a circle of masonry forming an arch.

"That is the old Brush street sewer," he explained. "Before the Ogden street trunk was built to connect with the sewage basin the sewerage all flowed into the bay, and this was one of the trunks. It ran down hill to the water and they had to build a new sewer to run down hill to the Ogden street trunk. This is still used to flush the streets and take the rain off the Ogden sewer when it rains, but that isn't its use for

"When I smelled sewer gas and was told that your pipes were all right I looked up the sewer map out of curiosity. I found that this old sewer runs directly under your property, and one afternoon I went down into the sewer in the guise of a workman."

"There is an opening into your factory that is hidden from search by the mechanism used to run the freight elevator. They thus came up into the cellar when they knew that the watchman would be upstairs touching the time clocks. With the pitch all down hill they could handle heavy loads on a rubber wheeled truck and run it right down to their boat."

"You would scarcely suspect a boat half a dozen blocks from your factory, and I didn't, either, until I tabbed up the robberies and found that they occurred only when law this same forward the middle of the night. At high tide it is too hard work to handle the plunder. The rest was easy enough. It was a good time tonight, and we surrounded them. When I heard them go by with the truck I gave the signal and the rest you know."

"It's mighty clever work, too," commented the detective. "I'd like to get Mr. Chisholm on the force."

"Mr. Chisholm is to be the junior partner in Sheldon's when he marries my daughter," explained the manufacturer. "I imagine that he will be too busy to give much time to detecting."

"Uncle Ned"

IT'S good to see a man around the place at last, even if it's only a boy," was the general comment on the arrival of Robert Henderson Hillman at the Sherin home. Years had passed since men had been admitted within the sacred precincts of Sherin Hill.

Mrs. Sherin's great love had come late in her life, when she was a widow with five daughters. She had fairly worshipped the unworthy man who on

through a gateway at the end of the short hill which formed his coasting ground, he ran into the stone wall, and one of the runners became detached from the sled.

Bobby was no cry-baby, and he uttered no sound as he sat in the snow where the shock had thrown him, but the woebegone expression on his chubby face attracted Ned, who looked over the wall to view the trouble.

"Going to fix it?" he asked, and Bobby nodded solemnly.

"It'll take a lot of time," he said, ruefully. "It's got to go to the blacksmith when the grocer comes tomorrow, and then, maybe the next day, Tommy'll bring it back—if he don't forget."

"And you will have to wait three days before you can go coasting again just because there is no man up at your house to use a screwdriver and a hammer?" Ned asked pityingly.

"You poor little chap, Pass the sled over here and I'll have it fixed in no time at all."

Very willingly Bobby passed the sled over the low wall and followed it over himself. He trotted beside Ned as that long-legged young man sped toward the tool house, and in a way lost in wonder at the display of tools in the little workshop.

Bobby was being educated by feminine methods. He was not even permitted a jack knife for fear that he might cut himself, and the shiny tools fascinated him. Ned good-naturedly showed him their uses and let him drive a few nails in a bit of joist, and later Bobby departed excited by the joy of having tasted the sweets of forbidden fruit.

He did not intend to make a secret of his visits to Ned's, but some innate delicacy prevented him from telling the willing aunts that he had found a playfellow more to his liking, so it was several weeks before Dell Sherin, who, being the youngest of the pretty aunts, was Bobby's most frequent playfellow, began to notice that the boy no longer came to her with plans that she coast or skate or throw snowballs.

Wondering why he should suddenly find new amusements, she slipped out one afternoon to see what took him so often to the east lawn.

As she came slowly toward the high hedge that in most places separated the hill grounds from all neighbors, the sound of boyish laughter struck her ear. Carefully she parted the branches of the hedge to peer through.

Bobby and a young man were peering each other with the newly fallen snow and she gasped with indignation as she saw that the young man occasionally threw a snowball with what seemed to her to be brutal force.

She was about to push through and demand that the game cease when Ned suddenly sent a ball whizzing toward Bobby's head with such force as caused the youngster to duck. The ball sped on and struck the hedge. The branches broke its speed but with no light shock it broke against Dell's snug little fur cap.

She gave a scream of terror that brought Bobby and Ned running toward the spot. Dell was more scared than hurt, but it was with a white,

anxious face that Ned leaned over her and sought to assure himself that no damage was done.

"I had no idea that there was anyone back of the hedge," he cried in distress. "It was very thoughtless of me, but—you all seem to keep away from this side of your property. Only Bobby ever comes here."

"It was to see what he was doing here that I came," she explained. "I was afraid that he might be getting into mischief."

"He was only seeking his own kind," declared Ned. "A small boy has a right to a father or an uncle or some one masculine, and since Bobby was not provided with any of these very essential relatives, I sought to supply the deficiency."

With a pang Dell realized how much happier Bobby had seemed lately, and Ned's simple explanation seemed to force home the argument far better than involved eloquence would have done.

"You are very good," she murmured, realizing for the first time that the young man was good to look upon. She struggled to her feet, swaying slightly, and Ned caught her arm to save her from a fall.

"You must let me see you to the house," he said with a gentle impulsiveness that was new and very pleasant to the girl. Slowly they moved toward the grim old house with Bobby acting as advance guard.

Mrs. Sherin and the three elder girls regarded the appearance of a man in the Sherin grounds with shocked surprise, but Bobby hastened to the rescue with an explanation.

"That so, Hiram?" said his wife. "Why, I should say so. The one I met knew that you cut my hair last, and, by gum, he never saw you in his life."

Enough to Make Them Fight.

Stub—If see that some of the Indians still claim persecution by the palefaced brother."

Penn—"That so? Guess poor Lo has been listening to some of those Indian songs the New York songsmiths turn out."

Tight Squeeze.

Mr. Greet (in pet)—"Well, Maria, if the shoe fits you wear it."

Mrs. Greet—"How absurd, Henry. You know I never wear a shoe that fits me. I always wear a size smaller."

The Husking Bee.

The country swain dropped his red ear and leaned over to the country lass.

"Mandy, c-can I kiss you now?" he asked anxiously.

"Not now, Hiram," giggled Mandy. "Why not?"

"Because even the corn has ears."

Familiar Expression.

The ferry across the Styx was crowded to suffocation.

"By jinks!" whispered a new arrival. "I believe at one time old Charon must have been a conductor on a street car."

"What gave you that idea?" asked another shade.

"Why, I just heard him say: 'Step lively, please, there is plenty of room up front!'"

JOKELETS

Paradoxical.

"You seem overheated, my lad," said the gentleman behind the scenes in the melodrama theater.

"Yes, boss," responded the youngster, as he mopped the perspiration from his brow. "I have de hottest part in de show."

"Indeed? And what is the part?"

"Why, I have to get 'way up in de flies an' tear up paper for de snow-storm in de blizzard scene."

Expert Opinion.

"Is there any truth in the saying that a woman can fool any man?" asked the sweet girl graduate.

"No," replied the grass widow. "A woman can only fool a man who makes a fool of himself about her."

The Magnetic Yellow.

A man may show a "yellow streak," yet count his friends in plenty. If each inch of that yellow streak is backed by a "yellow twenty."

Jealous of Jack.

Dick—"Did you enjoy yourself down at the masque ball last night?"

Edna—"Indeed I did. And coming home through the chilly night Jack Frost kissed my cheeks."

Dick—"Lucky Jack! The next time I am going disguised as Jack Frost myself."

Marvelous, Indeed.

"By heck, Cynthia," drawled old Farmer Hardapple, after his visit to St. Louis, "them that city barbers are mind readers."

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A Queer Match-Maker

HEY had known each other for years—ever since the reckless, care-free, tree-climbing days of their childhood.

She had been something of a tomboy, he remembered, but with a jolly good pal, one of the kind who could go over a fence like a squirrel, splash through pools of muddy water on a dare and who could keep a secret like the Sphinx itself.

Even in the midst of those perfect days their paths in life had separated. His parents had moved to a Western city, and, with solemn, childish vows of eternal fealty, he had gone away and left her on the verge of the first tears he had ever seen in her eyes.

Yet she had drifted out of his life and he out of hers. This past week, racing homeward on the liner from Cherbourg, was the first time they had met since that bitter parting.

They stood together by the rail, the girl talking lightly, the man listening with a grave, preoccupied smile.

At about them the white-capped seas flashed and sparkled in the morning sunshine. Far away, on the western horizon, a thin, blue line told of the proximity of land.

Suddenly the girl fell silent, watching intently the thin blue haze. When she turned to the man her eyes were shining.

"Don't you feel it?" she asked. "Feel what?"

"O, I can't explain it. A sort of general happy foolishness."

He remembered how she used to express her emotions in just the same unique fashion long ago. He smiled slowly.

"I can't own to any very marked emotions. Should I have them?"

"Why, that blue mist over there is home," she said with an emphasis that made him turn to her suddenly.

"I have never thought of it just that way before," said he.

"It should tighten your throat and make your eyes sort of blurry. You haven't the proper spirit," she chided.

"I'm afraid I haven't," he confessed. "Home, you see, is a word of relative potency. It's been a wanderer so long, you know—ever since my people died, just after we moved to the West. Now home to me is the place where nomadic fate happens to land me. It's Algiers or Naples or Stockholm or Hongkong."

"Poor Billy," she said gently. "Why what a lot of life you've missed."

He turned to her as if her words had brought to him some sudden realization.

"I have, Betty, that's a fact," he replied earnestly.

"A man without a country—an expatriate," she mused. "It isn't nice to think that of you, Billy."

"It isn't nice to think of myself when I'm abroad I shout my nationality from the housetops. I'm proud of it. And yet when I come back here I'm ill at ease. I've learned away from it too much. I've learned to know my London and my Paris better than I do my New York."

"Is it satisfying—this being a nomad?" she asked.

"I always thought so until this morning. I'd give worlds to feel as you do about that dry blue streak over there. It has opened my eyes."

"You'd better stay this time long enough to get acquainted with your own country."

"I'd like to. I would if—"

"If what?" she prompted.

"If I had someone to help me."

"You—"

"Me? How can I make you contented here, you nomad, stung with the wanderlust? Do you want me to climb trees with you again, and wade muddy puddles with you to shock the conventional souls?"

"I don't want to shock any soul," she said. "I want to be contented."

"You certainly are. Do you think just because I haven't seen you for years, just because you have been wandering up and down the earth—"

She was aware that there was a